

Wellness Advocate

Smarter Healthcare Solutions

Why Organic?

So you've seen organic foods in your local supermarket. You've heard they're supposed to be better for you, but their price gives you sticker shock. How do you decide whether buying organic should be a priority? The first step is to get informed. Read on for answers to some of the top questions about organic foods.

WHEN A FOOD IS LABELED "ORGANIC," WHAT DOES THAT REALLY MEAN?

Until 1999, there were no formal rules governing the term "organic" in the United States. At that time, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) established the Organic Rule, which set strict guidelines around the production of organic foods. Here are some of the basics:

- Organic farmers must use materials and practices that enhance the ecological balance of natural systems.
- Organic foods must be produced using no genetically engineered seeds or crops, sewage sludge, long-lasting pesticides, herbicides, fungicides or synthetic fertilizers.
- To ensure that no chemical residues remain in the soil, land used for organic crop production must not have been treated with chemicals for three years.
- For livestock, farmers must provide organically-grown feed, fresh air and outdoor access and use no antibiotics or growth hormones.
- Organic food processors cannot use irradiation, genetically modified organisms (GMOs) or synthetic preservatives in processing the food.
- To carry the official USDA organic seal, products must contain at least 95% organically produced ingredients. If a product contains at least 70% organic ingredients, it may be labeled "*Made with Organic Ingredients.*"

WHAT KINDS OF FOODS ARE AVAILABLE AS ORGANIC?

When most people hear the term "organic," they think of the produce aisle at the health food store. Today's organic products are found in nearly every aisle. They include: meat, poultry, dairy products, breads, cereals, pastas, frozen foods, canned goods, baby food, chocolate, coffee, wine and even pet foods.

IS ORGANIC FOOD BETTER FOR ME?

There are no scientific studies showing that eating organic food is healthier than eating conventionally-grown foods. Still, it is important to remember that organic foods have not been exposed to potentially harmful chemicals.

IS ORGANIC FARMING BETTER FOR THE ENVIRONMENT?

Yes. Organic farming does not use chemicals that may contaminate rain and groundwater. Organic farming maintains healthy, fertile topsoil with rich biological matter that does not erode into lakes or streams. Organic farmers are also more likely to raise a variety of crops and livestock, which helps keep the agricultural gene pool diversified. Buying locally-grown produce saves transport fuel as well.

Quick Takes



DID YOU KNOW?

- Organic food sales have increased by more than 20% per year during the past decade.
- Health food stores aren't the only places to find organic foods. You'll find them for sale in most supermarkets and even huge discount retailers.

- Many restaurants are promoting the organic options on their menus.

DO AN ORGANIC TASTE TEST.

Buy some conventionally-grown carrots and organic carrots. Wash, slice and set them out on unmarked plates. Ask your family if they can taste a difference. Try lettuce varieties too.

Why Organic? *(continued)*

WHY DO ORGANIC FOODS USUALLY COST MORE?

Organic farmers must comply with strict organic certification standards. This means more labor and paperwork at every step of the process. Large-scale conventional food producers save money by producing and shipping in bulk, which organic farmers cannot do. Also, organic foods are not treated with preservatives that typically makes transport easier and prolongs shelf life.

WHAT DOES "ALL-NATURAL" MEAN ON A FOOD PRODUCT LABEL?

The USDA's National Organic Standards do not define or regulate the use of the term "natural." In most cases, the word is a marketing device implying that the product has undergone minimal processing. However, the USDA's Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) regulates the term "natural" for meat and poultry labels. Keep in mind that "natural" **does not** mean "organic."

DO ORGANIC FRUITS & VEGETABLES TASTE BETTER?

Many people swear that organic produce tastes better. It is more likely to have been grown locally and to arrive at the market more quickly. Organic farms generally operate on a much smaller scale than conventional farms. Organic

farmers are also more willing to try plant varieties where flavor, not durability for transport, is the primary goal. The best way to decide if you think organics taste better is to buy some and have a taste test!

HOW LARGE IS THE ORGANIC FOOD INDUSTRY?

Sixty-six percent of U.S. consumers report they use organic products at least occasionally. Organic food sales have increased by more than 20% annually during the past decade. Today, organic foods are estimated to be a \$13 billion industry.

SO HOW DO I DECIDE WHETHER TO BUY ORGANIC?

In the end, the decision about whether to buy organic food is a personal one. You need to weigh the lower costs and convenience of shopping for conventional foods to the possible health benefits (and environmental impact) of buying organic. It does not have to be all or nothing. Many shoppers buy organic products for some foods and conventionally-grown products for others. Whatever you choose, remember that eating a variety of fruits, vegetables and whole-grains offers a wealth of health benefits whether they are conventional or organic.

Chicken Tarragon

Makes: 4 servings | 30 minutes



This easy-to-prepare chicken dish showcases tender and sweet spring vegetables.

Nutrition Bonus:
Cooked carrots are a better source of beta-carotene than raw carrots.

Ingredients:

- 12 oz. skinless chicken breast meat
- 2 teaspoons olive oil
- 1/4 cup dry vermouth, white wine or apple cider
- 3 cups low-sodium chicken broth
- 1 tablespoon minced fresh tarragon or 1 teaspoon dried
- 1 teaspoon tarragon vinegar or lemon juice
- 2 scallions, thinly sliced
- 1/4 teaspoon salt
- 1/2 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
- 4 oz. (about 1 cup) thin green beans, trimmed and cut into 2-inch lengths
- 16 baby carrots, quartered lengthwise
- 1 small leek or spring onion, quartered lengthwise and cut into 1-inch lengths
- 1 cup fresh or frozen peas

Preparation:

1. Cut chicken into 1-inch pieces. Heat oil in a large nonstick skillet over medium-high heat; sauté the chicken for 3 to 4 minutes or until golden. Transfer the chicken onto a plate and set aside.
2. Pour vermouth, wine or cider into the skillet and boil rapidly until only about 1 tablespoon remains. Add chicken broth and stir in tarragon, vinegar, scallions, salt and black pepper. Bring to a boil and add beans, carrots and leeks. Reduce heat to low; cover and simmer for 3 minutes. Add the chicken and peas. Cover and simmer for 3 to 4 minutes or until the chicken is cooked through and vegetables are just tender.
3. Using a slotted spoon, transfer vegetables and chicken to shallow soup bowls. Increase the heat to high, bring the broth to a boil and cook for 3 minutes to intensify the flavors. Ladle the broth over chicken and vegetables.

Nutritional Information (per serving):
218 Calories; 5g Fat; 1g Saturated fat; 24g Protein;
16g Carbohydrate; 5g Fiber; 463mg Sodium